

Rapidly Deploying Aerospace Power

Lessons from Allied Force

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SINCE THE END of Operation Desert Storm, the US military has participated in 50 small-scale contingencies; the humanitarian relief effort for the 750,000 Kosovar Albanians displaced by Slobodan Milosevic is just one example. Because many of these contingency operations were without deliberate plans and without an infrastructure in place, aerospace forces have had to respond to this trend with changes in organization and technology. Previously, Air Force units have been committed through stovepipes: engineers, communicators, medics, airfield managers, security forces, airlift control elements, and so forth, often in advance of an established Joint Task Force (JTF) or even a Commander of Air Force Forces (COMAFFOR). While other services are tasked to deploy in recognizable units (a US Marine Expeditionary Unit or Marine Expeditionary Force, for example), Air Force units tend to be tasked by Unit Type Codes (UTC) or, in some cases, individual specialties. While we have demonstrated the ability to react quickly, we often outpace our own ability to set up appropriate command struc-



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tures. In other cases, we hinder our ability to react quickly by requiring large and cumbersome survey teams, which can be as intimidating as the threat we are attempting to counter, especially to a small nation. We can do better than that.

To help aerospace forces take maximum advantage of that thing we do best in today's expeditionary world—get there rapidly—and to do it without having to smother host nations with survey teams, US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) formed the 86th Contingency Response Group (CRG) as a test for the Air Force. Our chief of staff, Gen Mike Ryan, gave permission to create the unit just as events in Serbia were coming to a boil. This is the story of the 86th and of a handful of dedicated airmen who made a big difference for thousands of refugees and demonstrated the value of an organized “first in” capability to our Expeditionary Air Force.

Description of the Group

The 86th CRG is designed to be a multi-disciplinary, cross-functional team whose mis-

sion is to provide the first on-scene Air Force forces trained to command, assess, and prepare a base for expeditionary aerospace forces. The cross-functional design under a single commander provides a unity of effort while also minimizing redundant taskings or personnel. This in turn allows the unit to be trained to task and ready to deploy rapidly—all with minimal equipment and personnel.

The group currently consists of 134 individuals, which makes it one of the smallest groups in the Air Force. It is divided into two squadrons—the 86th Air Mobility Squadron and the 786th Security Forces Squadron. More than 40 diverse specialties comprise these two squadrons, including security forces, communications, aerial port, Office of Special Investigations, medical, intelligence, command and control, fire support, supply, airfield management, information management, maintenance, civil engineering, vehicle maintenance, and health care. When deployed, this core can expand up to a five-hundred-person to two-thousand-person force, depending on the mission requirements to establish an expeditionary base for follow-on





Operating under the primitive airport conditions at Tirana, Albania, posed a constant challenge for the CRG.

forces. The expansion process relies on a three-tier system.

Tier One personnel are not assigned to the CRG but are "by-name" assigned as CRG augmentees. These Tier One personnel work closely with the CRG on a daily basis, exercise with the group, and are trained in CRG-specific operations and force-protection concepts. Specialties in which Tier One individuals work include weather, air traffic control, services, communications, civil engineering, finance, law, combat camera, fire protection, protocol, combat control, psychological operations, civil-military affairs, personnel accounting, ground and flight safety, explosive-ordnance disposal, biological/chemical warfare, fuel, mortuary affairs, and chaplain concerns.

To complement these Tier One personnel, the CRG has access to Tier Two personnel. As within Tier One, Tier Two personnel come from units that work regularly with the CRG; however, they are not specifically identified as CRG augmentees, nor are they identified "by-name." The final category consists of personnel within existing UTCs that provide the specialized capabilities available through normal training channels.

The three-tier process generates functional experts in various readiness levels who can support a mission philosophy of speed and precision. The 86th CRG was designed to get in within hours of its tasking, take control of airfield operations, establish security and communication, and quickly assess what additional capability would be required.

First Use and the Resulting Impact on JTF Shining Hope

The 86th CRG achieved initial operating capability on 20 March 1999; it was called into action less than two weeks later. Shortly after the air operations in Yugoslavia began on 24 March 1999, Slobodan Milosevic's forces increased their ethnic cleansing operations against the Kosovar Albanians. This in turn caused a massive exodus of refugees from Kosovo to both the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia and Albania. While the various governmental and nongovernmental organizations responded to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis, they were overwhelmed, and by 1 April they requested help.

In response, the United States European Command formed a JTF with Maj Gen Bill Hinton, then the Third Air Force commander, as the JTF Shining Hope commander. General Hinton and key members of

his staff met at Headquarters USAFE on 2 and 3 April to assess the situation and begin planning. They focused on Tirana, Albania, which would be the distribution center for humanitarian aid, and concluded that the lack of information about Tirana's airfield as well as the absence of a supporting infrastructure called for the 86th CRG. On 3 April, the 86th CRG deployed to Tirana, set up air base operations, and facilitated the reception of hun-

Mere hours after landing, the CRG had established a secure base and began off-loading supplies. However, even though the group was unopposed, the pace of continuous operations proved difficult. For example, the heavy flow of arrivals and departures could be maintained only when the CRG assumed air traffic control for all Albanian airspace.





The need to defend expeditionary air bases may present unprecedented challenges. At a time when US airborne and orbital forces appear to be less and less susceptible to their enemies, forward basing will invite any and all forms of asymmetric attack.

dreds of aircraft responding to the desperate humanitarian situation caused by ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

In the morning hours of Sunday, 4 April, three C-130s took off from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, bound for Tirana, carrying 38 members of the 86th CRG and their commander, Col Clifton Bray, who was also tasked to be the COMAFFOR. Within hours of landing, the CRG established a secure perimeter, set up the necessary communication capability, and began off-loading food and aid from C-17s. By day's end, the group had laid the foundation of a relief-delivery system that would be used by all who responded to the crisis. In the ensuing 58 days, the 86th CRG would manage and off-load humanitarian supplies from hundreds of airlift aircraft from France, Portugal, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, the

United Arab Emirates, Spain, and Russia. The CRG also provided the framework for the initial deployment of the US Air Force units and assisted other US services and multinational forces when they deployed into Tirana. The group provided initial on-scene support with communications, aerial port, and security for Task Force Hawk, Allied Mobile Force Land, the USS *Inchon*, the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the Air Mobility Operations Group, RED HORSE, Seabees, and civil-military affairs.

One of the major obstacles for the relief operations was the inability of the Albanian air traffic control system to handle an air operation of this magnitude. Previously, the airfield had only 10 arrivals and departures per day. Within a few short weeks, under the 86th CRG's leadership, there were over four hundred takeoffs and landings per day. However,

by mid April, Tirana's airspace became so congested that humanitarian aircraft were being turned away. The Albanian authorities looked to NATO for help; NATO in turn looked to the US Air Force, specifically the CRG, to control Albania's airspace and Tirana's airport. Essentially, the CRG commander, Colonel Bray, became the "FAA director" for Albania. The CRG set up a radar approach control, a tower, and navigational aids, and within days, the pace of relief flights resumed.

In addition to setting up effective airfield operations, the CRG also provided the initial US military leadership in the daily Emergency Management Group that met in downtown Tirana. This group provided the senior leadership for directing the relief operation and consisted of representatives from all the participating countries and relief organizations, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the World Food Program, the World Health Program, and the International Red Cross. Additionally, all the nations contributing military forces sent their commanders to participate in the group. During the first week, the CRG assumed the lead role for the multinational military forces attending this meeting and briefed the group on the military actions taken each day. The CRG created a military working group that met after the Emergency Management Group and solved numerous problems associated with the start-up of military relief operations in Tirana. When NATO assumed control of the military relief operations in Albania, the CRG turned chairmanship of the military working group over to Albania Force personnel.

The CRG was a large reason the United States and its allies were able to achieve their goal: to provide the displaced Kosovar Albanians adequate shelter, food, and public health conditions until the political situation in Kosovo permitted their return. The ability of the CRG to rapidly establish a secure and effective air base and airspace in and around Tirana and to coordinate and assist all US



Airmen install drainage pipes along the main road leading to Tirana-Rinas Airport. They also repaired and enlarged the main road leading out of the airport.

and multinational organizations allowed it to successfully accomplish its mission—the care and feeding of the Kosovar Albanians. USAFE's employment of the 86th CRG in the Albanian crucible provided an opportunity to study and gather data needed to fine-tune the CRG as well as examine its utility for other theaters.

The Need for These Capabilities in All Theaters

The requirement for the CRG capability is not unique to USAFE; we believe this capability is fundamental to the entire Air Force. We cannot plan with certainty which bases our expeditionary forces will operate from, as we just proved in USAFE—a theater where unplanned contingencies have not been consid-

ered much of a threat. This inability to plan with certainty is a major impediment, preventing the Air Force from pre-positioning necessary equipment for expeditionary operations. Additionally, the rapid portion of expeditionary operations is based on deploying with enough equipment and personnel to begin operations immediately, rather than waiting for survey teams and tailored UTCs. Accurate information is crucial to accomplishing this—the CRG is central to gaining that information.

Because the CRG can arrive at an expeditionary airfield quickly, it can fill the initial information void faced by contingency planners in assessing and preparing a staging base for expeditionary aerospace forces. By making these assessments, the CRG is a key component not only of gaining entry to locations, but also of defining the follow-on forces' logistical requirements more precisely. The CRG is crucial to rapid deployment and employment.

The Way Ahead

The first step is to learn how to deal with success—the success of being needed or considered irreplaceable. The JTF deployed the 86th CRG into Tirana without a clear exit strategy or transition plan, and because of its success, we had a difficult time bringing the group home to prepare for the next contingency. Part of the concept is that the CRG is the “initial” presence and enables follow-on forces. As we develop the expeditionary concepts, our plan for follow-on forces must provide for rapid reconstitution of the CRG. The CRG is like our “silver bullet” to enable expeditionary operations, and it is critical that we are able to rapidly reload and fire it at new “targets.”

For example, when the Supreme Allied Commander Europe decided to deploy additional CONUS-based Air Force units into the

theater for Operation Allied Force, there were no more suitable airfields in Italy. USAFE planners had to explore airfields further away, and suitable airfields were found at Bandirma and Balikesir in northwestern Turkey. Although these airfields were inside NATO, other NATO nations were not prepared to operate from them. In this high-paced reinforcement of Operation Allied Force, the 86th CRG was unavailable to provide a real-time assessment of the two Turkish airfields to refine the flow of material and personnel from the 4th Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina.

Additionally, the CRG needs to be able to operate in scenarios across the spectrum of conflict. Tirana was an unopposed entry. The Air Force needs to work with the other services to enable the CRG to rapidly assume control of a base captured or secured by ground forces. We must be capable of defending this freshly seized expeditionary air base from both ground- and air-based threats. This will be a large transition from our standard security infrastructure. To defend an air base in such a demanding environment requires that we reexamine the CRG to determine if it is properly organized and trained. The Royal Air Force's Regiment provides us with a standard we should aim toward. The success of the CRG will rest upon its people—people who are as proficient at warrior skills as in their Air Force Specialty Codes.

The test of USAFE's 86th CRG was a resounding success and far surpassed our expectations toward enhancing expeditionary operations. We will continue to refine the composition, training, and doctrine for our CRG, and we will forward our recommendations for how Contingency Response Groups should be included in force packages that will make up our Expeditionary Aerospace Forces in the next century. □